

vital component of New Jersey's tourist industry, but is an important natural resource that supports populations of commercially and recreationally significant fish and rare and endangered species.

Non-point source pollution, while diffuse, is cumulatively the most important issue in addressing adverse impacts on water quality and the health of living resources in the Bay. The contaminants found in rain and snowmelt, as well as groundwater, contribute to non-point source pollution. The Final Comprehensive and Conservation Management Plan for Barnegat Bay will be available to the public in May 2000 for public review. But without the additional funding for this program, as well as explicitly permitting the NEPs to use Federal funds for implementation of their programs, the Federal government would have absolved itself of responsibility as a partner with the states in protecting and enhancing the Nation's most endangered habitats.

Therefore, I would like to thank my colleagues for supporting this important bill and protecting our Nation's natural resources for future generations.

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1237, the National Estuary Program (NEP) Reauthorization. In 1987, the National Estuary Program was established to promote protection and restoration of the health of estuaries and their living resources. This program has made a profound difference nationally. This program has been tremendously important to the restoration of Galveston Bay which borders my district in Texas.

In 1995, the Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP) received approval for its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) to improve water quality and enhance living resources. Galveston Bay's watershed lies in one of the most heavily industrialized and most heavily populated regions in the United States. Wastewater discharges from communities and industries in Galveston Bay account fully for half of Texas' total wastewater discharges every year. Since some pollution entering the Houston Ship Channel comes from industrial businesses located along or near the Channel, GBEP worked with the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission to decrease the amount of pollution through source reduction and waste minimization techniques. Together they developed one of the largest voluntary prevention programs in the country. Under this program, businesses located along or near the Channel are selected to voluntarily participate in environmental training and to submit to pollution prevention audits. Lessons learned from GBEP's voluntary program have been incorporated into the State's Clean Texas 2000 program.

GBEP has funded the Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF) Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Program to not only monitor water quality but also recruit and train volunteers, obtain and distribute monitoring supplies and equipment. GBEP has also developed the Galveston Bay Information Center Project, a vital project to preserve long-term access to Galveston Bay research and information had occurred in the Bay's history.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the National Estuary Program has been instrumental in preserving and protecting America's treasured bays and estuaries including Galveston Bay. This legislation should be adopted.

I challenge my colleagues who support reauthorization of this vital program to take the next step to protect the almost 40 percent of our Nation's estuary waters under threat. I urge you to sign on as sponsors of H.R. 1775, the Estuary Habitat Restoration Act of 1999. To date, this legislation, which Representative GILCHREST of Maryland introduced last May along with myself and many others now has 121 cosponsors. The legislation would provide dedicated Federal funds to habitat restoration for estuaries like Galveston Bay. Moreover, H.R. 1775 would enhance the work of the National Estuary Program by developing new ways to optimize the numerous existing Federal restoration programs. It also promotes voluntary community estuary restoration efforts and the establishment of public-private partnerships to work with community-based organizations and local governments to protect estuaries.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1237 and reauthorize this vital national program for another five years. We must strive to promote efforts on the local level to develop and implement long-term estuary conservation and management plans.

Mr. BOEHLERT. Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1237, introduced by Representative JIM SEXTON, would reauthorize and improve the National Estuary Program, a broadly supported, comprehensive approach to estuary conservation and management.

I want to thank the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman BUD SHUSTER, Ranking Democratic Members Representative JIM OBERSTAR, and BOB BORSKI, the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee Ranking Democratic Member, for their leadership and assistance.

Under the current National Estuary Program, EPA provides assistance to State, local governments, and other interested parties to form a management conference for an estuary of national significance, and develop a comprehensive conservation and management plan for that estuary.

Of the 28 estuaries currently in the National Estuary Program, 21 have finished this planning process and are now trying to implement their management plans.

Unfortunately, section 320 only allows Federal assistance for development of these plans, and not for implementation.

Passage of H.R. 1237 would authorize EPA to provide assistance for management plan implementation, as well as development.

This bill will help protect and restore our Nation's estuaries—those natural resource treasures that are constantly under siege, yet continue to provide invaluable environmental and economic benefits to the entire Nation.

I strongly support passage of H.R. 1237 and urge my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. BORSKI. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. HORN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. HORN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1237, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof)

the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Edwin Thomas, one of his secretaries.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. HORN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 1237, the bill just passed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING NECESSITY TO EXPEDITE SETTLEMENT PROCESS FOR DISCRIMINATION CLAIMS AGAINST DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE BROUGHT BY AFRICAN-AMERICAN FARMERS

Mr. SIMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 296) expressing the sense of the Congress regarding the necessity to expedite the settlement process for discrimination claims against the Department of Agriculture brought by African-American farmers.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 296

Whereas the Secretary of Agriculture has conceded that the Department of Agriculture and agents of the Department discriminated against certain African-American farmers during the period from 1981 through 1996 in the delivery of Commodity Credit Corporation and disaster assistance programs;

Whereas, to permit the resolution of complaints that were filed by these farmers before July 1, 1997, but not responded to by the Department of Agriculture in a timely manner, section 741 of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1999 (112 Stat. 2681-30; 7 U.S.C. 2279 note; as contained in section 101(a) of division A of Public Law 105-277), waived relevant statutes of limitation that prevented the adjudication of these complaints;

Whereas, on April 14, 1999, United States District Judge Paul Friedman issued a final opinion and order that finalized class action lawsuits filed by African-American farmers;

Whereas the farmers were ordered to file claims to determine their eligibility for the settlement ordered by the court;

Whereas the court has set and the Secretary of Agriculture has entered into a final settlement consent decree that has become the order of the court;

Whereas, once a claimant is deemed to be a member of the class and has proven discrimination, the claimant is entitled to the settlement set forth by the consent decree; and

Whereas the large volume of claims filed as ordered by the court have severely delayed